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Sanctions That Work: The Bush Perspective on Iraq

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Title: Sanctions That Work: The Bush Perspective on Iraq

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Abstract. This article describes some implications of United States (US) President Bush's comments on "sanctions that work" in the context of US foreign policy towards Iraq.

On February 22 during the first press conference of the new US President, George W. Bush, a reporter asked how the President would characterize sanctions that work in the context of US foreign policy towards Iraq. The President's answer might surprise observers and analysts who assume that sanctions that work would achieve specific changes in the Iraqi government's behavior--viz., ending the development, fielding, and proliferation and preventing the employment of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. These specific changes constitute the public rationale for implementing sanctions along with the intent to deter Iraqi regional invasions. A less public rational seems to be the intent to topple the Saddam Hussein regime.

The President responded that sanctions that work are sanctions that are supported by other governments in the region. The problem here is that support is not necessarily related with achieving any consequence on Iraqi governmental behavior and could even affect such behavior in a manner undesired by the US government. If instead, the desired US consequence of the sanctions is to generate support for US foreign policy by generating a policy--e.g., sanctions or any other intervention--that, in turn, garners support, one would be extremely hard pressed to support the notion that sanctions would be the foreign policy of choice.

A second interpretation is that the President meant that sanctions that work are sanctions wherein other governments act in the same manner as the US. They, too, refuse to export and/or import specified resources and to allow political elites to transit certain areas and have access to assets invested in other countries. They, too, agree to Issue forth similar demarches and contingencies about behavior. The problem here is that even if all countries implement sanctions in a comprehensive and consistent fashion, Iraqi governmental behavior may still not change or change in an undesired direction. Thus, the President's statement that "a good sanction policy is one where the United States is able to build a coalition around the strategy" must be at the least qualified.

As previously described in IBPP articles, sanctions can have no effect on a target's behavior or increase or decrease various behavioral aspects. They can function as positive or negative reinforcement, omission training, or punishment. They can be sensed, perceived, and cognitively processed in an infinite number of ways by a target. (This is why the current US trend to refocus sanctions on Iraq can be seen as "tightening the noose" or giving up.) Seeking sanctions support is only accidentally the route to sanctions that work. As US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, continues a dialogue with Mideast authorities and provides input to the President, he may receive this message from allies and adversaries alike. (See Al-Nouri, Q.N. (1997). The impact of the economic embargo on Iraqi families: Restructuring of tribes, socioeconomic classes and households. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 28, 99-112; Boehm, C. (2000). Conflict and the evolution of social control. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 7, 79-101; Doob, A. N. (2000). Transforming the punishment environment: Understanding public views of what should be accomplished at sentencing. *Canadian Journal of Criminology*, 42, 323-340; Foreign

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